

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

061123Z Jan 06

ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	EB-00	UTED-00
	VC1-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCIE-00	NSAE-00
	ISN-00	NSCE-00	OIC-00	OMB-00	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00
	P-00	ISNE-00	SP-00	SS-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	T-00
	IIP-00	PMB-00	PRM-00	DRL-00	G-00	SAS-00	/000W

-----7A997A 061442Z /03

FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0198
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY
ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY

UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000018

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREF PREL PHUM KIRF SOCI EAID VM ETMIN HUMANR RELFREE
SUBJECT: VISIT TO ETHNIC MINORITY MINORITY RETURNEES IN DAK LAK PROVINCE

REF: HCMC 962

1. (SBU) Summary: During a January 4-5 visit to the Central Highlands province of Dak Lak, PolOff met with four ethnic Jarai voluntary returnees from Cambodia and the family of a fifth. Government officials reported -- and other returnees confirmed -- that a sixth returnee was killed in a late December altercation with his brother. UNHCR was notified of the death. As requested, our meetings were private (returnee and family), although we recruited a local ethnic Jarai government clerk to act as an impromptu translator.

2. (SBU) None of the returnees or their families indicated that they felt they had been abused or discriminated against since returning to Vietnam. Unlike our September visit to Gia Lai province where we met with 18 returnees, none of the Dak Lak cohort raised grievances related to GVN policies on religion or alleged expropriation of land. Nonetheless, our sense is that the cohort's meager economic prospects -- they are poorly educated -- and government pressure due to fears of ethnic minority separatism drove the group to Cambodia. Septel will report on discussions on religious freedom and family reunification visas (VISAS-93) at the provincial and district levels in Dak Lak. End Summary.

3. (SBU) During a January 4-5 visit to the Central Highlands province of Dak Lak, ConGen PolOff traveled to Ea Sup district near the Cambodian border to meet with ethnic minority returnees. Post had requested private meetings with a cohort of seven individuals from the district, all of whom had returned voluntarily to the province in November 2005, after crossing to Cambodia in July 2005. Ultimately we met with four returnees and the parents and sister of a fifth. A sixth returnee was killed in a family dispute a few weeks earlier and a seventh lived in another village some 15 miles away. The meetings were conducted in the homes of returnees without the presence of government officials, although officials and media accompanied us to the front gate of the homes. A local ethnic Jarai clerk employed by the district was asked on the spot to act as our interpreter.

Local Government: Committed to peaceful reintegration

4. (SBU) Ea Sup District officials underscored their commitment to reintegrate the returnees peacefully and to fulfill Vietnam's obligations under the Tripartite Agreement with UNHCR and the Cambodian Government. The returnees were being treated fairly and humanely, the People's Committee Chairman assured us. The Province had provided returnees with different forms of assistance (rice, seed, food, clothes, kerosene) under GVN and provincial-level rural development programs. It was up to officials at the village level to decide what specific assistance was needed -- including providing housing and land grants -- after conducting interviews with the returnees. Because the families of some returnees were relatively well off, some individuals did not receive any assistance. The officials said that they recognized the spiritual needs of the ethnic minority community in Ea Sup and were working to implement the GVN's new legal framework on religion. That said, officials claimed that, unlike other areas of Dak Lak, Ea Sup had a small Protestant community that "freely worshiped in their homes."

No Claims of Mistreatment

15. (SBU) Following the official meeting, we met with four returnees: R'Mah Deuk, Ksor Khinh, K'Pa Un, and R'Mah Wik. All appeared healthy and in good spirits. In response to our questions, they did not complain of any official harassment or physical abuse either before their flight to Cambodia, in UNHCR custody, or since their return to Vietnam in November. None of the returnees was agitated; some smiled and laughed, others appeared shy and embarrassed to be in the spotlight. All said that we were the first foreign visitors to meet them. We also met with the parents and sister of a fifth returnee, K'Pa Samay; she had not yet returned from the family fields, where she was working. Her parents said that she was treated well upon return and did not face harassment or discrimination. (Note: UNHCR Vietnam Mission Director Vu Anh Son told us that UNHCR had not yet visited the Ea Sup group but a visit was planned for mid-January. End Note.)

Economic Conditions: Poor But Not Hungry

16. (SBU) Government officials told us that the returnees and their families live below the poverty line according to new GVN income standards of 200,000 Dong (USD 27) per family member per month. That said, the village -- and the returnees themselves -- were relatively prosperous, particularly in comparison to other ethnic minority villages that we have seen elsewhere in

the Central Highlands. Four returnee homes were electrified; the fifth household was waiting for the local government to connect the power line. Three of the five households had motorbikes; two also had tractors. Three had televisions. A number also owned some water buffalo and cattle. Government officials also said that the families of two of the returnees had received low-cost agricultural development loans of five and eight million Dong (USD 300 and USD 500 respectively) to help develop family land devoted to cashew-nut production.

17. (SBU) According to data provided by local government officials and confirmed by the returnees and their families, the five households had landholdings of between 2 hectares and 5 hectares of rice, corn, beans and cashew nuts. (Note: 1 hectare equals 2.47 acres. End Note.) Government officials observed that the villagers low level of education -- three of the five returnees were illiterate, the two others had a middle school education -- sharply reduced their overall productivity and income; better educated ethnic Vietnamese with similar property are far wealthier.

Death of a Returnee

18. (SBU) Local Government officials reported that Siu Hon, a 26-year old, unmarried returnee was killed in a family altercation at the end of December. According to the officials, during a family gathering, Hon and his brother became drunk and starting arguing. During the course of the argument, Hon was stabbed by his brother and died. His brother is under police custody at the local hospital, where he is being treated for wounds suffered during the altercation. A second returnee family that lived near Hon privately confirmed the government report.

Reason for Flight

19. (SBU) Government Officials maintained that the returnees fled to Cambodia because of their marginal socio-economic condition. "Bad people" reportedly told them that were they to cross to Cambodia they would be resettled in the United States and the USG would ensure that they would "never have to work again." Overall, 19 persons from Ea Sup district fled to Cambodia since 2004. Another 24 fled after unrest in the region in 2001. Government officials asked us to emphasize to the returnees and their families that the reality in the U.S. was quite different from the rumors being spread in the ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands.

110. (SBU) The returnees were vague about why they crossed to Cambodia, but it appears that the entire group made the two-day crossing together. Initially, the four returnees that we interviewed -- all young men between 16 and 23 -- told us that they went "for fun" or "were drunk" or were "following a friend." During our interview, K'Pa Un, told us that unspecified friends told him that he could get resettled in the United States if he crossed to Cambodia. Un and the other returnees said that, once in Cambodia they became disillusioned, missed their families and wanted to return home "as quickly as possible. The parents of K'Pa Samay told us that they had no idea where their daughter had gone; they were working in the fields when their daughter set out for Cambodia. They maintained that she did not explain why she left, and they did not ask.

111. (SBU) Unlike our discussions with returnees from Gia Lai province (reftel), none of the Ea Sup returnees said that they

crossed to Cambodia because of fear of government repression or religious harassment. Of the five ethnic minority families that we interviewed, three self-identified as Protestant, although none could or would state to which denomination they belonged. A fourth returnee was a lapsed Catholic, the fifth claimed to be an animist. The Protestant families told us that the Government instructed the local congregation not to gather to observe Christmas, because there was neither a pastor nor church in the area. As a consequence "extended families" gathered in individual homes to celebrate.

Comment

12. (SBU) All the returnees were young, between 16 and 26. Although their present economic situation is relatively stable, their future is not bright. They are severely uneducated, with little prospect for alternative employment other than working the family homestead. However, family landholdings are too small to subdivide economically and the returnees are competing with their many other siblings for the family's land. Moreover, the prospect of obtaining large tracts of additional land is dwindling over time. Government fears over ethnic minority

separatism and the role of the "Dega Protestant Church" in that movement also appears to be an unstated factor in encouraging the cross-border movement. Ea Sup, which appears to have banned Protestant Christmas gatherings altogether, is one of the tougher districts in what hitherto has been the Central Highland's toughest province. End Comment.
WINNICK

NNNN